

Boyle: 'A few committing lots of crimes'

By Janice Brunson
staff writer

The last time Detroit's crime rate took a significant downturn, Justice Patricia Boyle recalled, was in 1976 when the state Supreme Court ordered Recorder's Courts to clear their dockets.

In the flurry that followed, plea bargains were made, criminals were sentenced to prison, and crime in the city plunged an estimated 20 percent over the next 24 months.

"A few people are committing lots of crimes, and they were temporarily out of commission," Boyle told the Birmingham/Bloomfield League of Women Voters Monday.

NO ONE CAUSE is responsible for increased crime rates, Boyle said in reply to a question. But among the factors, she said, are judicial sensitivity to crimes of sex and abuse,

population bulges of men aged 18 to 25 and economics.

"Statistics show that during the depression, crime rates were low. During the 1980s, a time of affluence, rates were high."

"In my opinion, the major reason is the breakdown of families and churches, traditional standards for measuring behavior."

On whether she agreed with Justice Sandra Day O'Connor's comments last week about the exclusion of women in the judiciary, Boyle said, "Michigan is singularly blessed with a number of women, partly due to our history of women in labor movements."

"In general, the electorate has confidence in women in judiciary roles," said Boyle, who was a federal court judge when Gov. James J. Blanchard appointed her to the state's highest court. With a reputation as a hard liner in criminal cases,

she easily won re-election in 1985.

BOYLE SUMMARIZED the findings of a 26-member citizens committee on court improvement, a report she described as fresh, disturbing and historic. Key findings:

• Few court houses — only those constructed or remodeled in recent years — have access for the handicapped.

• Juveniles in custody for murder are released from all court supervision at the age of 19.

• Victims of crime are too often treated callously by the judiciary, and the poor, elderly, minorities and women are treated differently and "less well" than others.

• People in Michigan favor the election of judges but need more and better information upon which to make voting decisions.

• In cases involving parental termination, court decisions often took years. In the process, children were denied supportive adults while testifying in court. Foster parents were banned from testifying.

THE 26 CITIZENS who served on the committee represented all walks of life — businessmen, laborers, housewives, senior citizens. None was professionally involved in the judiciary system.

Committee members sought citizen input by conducting public polls and by holding five public hearings across the state.



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Supreme Court Justice

Justice Patricia Boyle

Supreme Court assume a supervisory role over trial courts and that trial courts conduct periodic internal reviews from which the Supreme Court will formulate new procedures for the lower courts.

The Supreme Court will monitor trial courts, seeing that new practices are adhered to.

Periodic opinion surveys on juror

"WHAT WAS recommended to us is truly historic," Boyle said. The committee recommended the

treatment and the provision of court advocates or ombudsmen for defendants were called for.

All children should be accompanied by supportive adults at all phases of the judicial experience. Video-tapes should be acceptable for court testimony.

During sentencing, the court be made aware of current practices in carrying out sentences, and defense lawyers should be required to inform the court of the earliest possible date a defendant can be released from prison.

LAWYERS FOR the indigent be paid by the lawyers trust account, the committee suggested.

"The most remarkable recommendation was that of judicial accountability," Boyle said.

The individual performance of each Supreme Court justice would be assessed each year, and the report would be made public.

Finally, the committee recommended citizens committees become a permanent fixture within the judicial system.

Boyle said justices on the high court are currently studying the report, "a means of moving forward to adopt the recommendations."

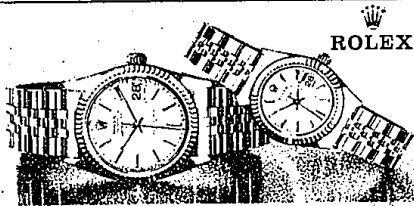
State jobless rate rose in February

Auto industry layoffs and post-holiday job losses in the retail trade industry caused Michigan's February unemployment rate to rise by more than a percentage point to 8.5 percent, according to Richard Simmons Jr., director of the Michigan Employment Security Commission.

According to state labor force estimates prepared by the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, Michigan's jobless level grew by 49,000 during February to 352,000.

Scattered layoffs in the state's manufacturing industries, especially among the automotive and related firms, and post-holiday employment declines in the retail trade and some service industries accounted for the increase in unemployment, Simmons said.

IN JANUARY the state's unemployment rate was 7.4 percent with 333,000 out of work, Simmons said. Nevertheless, Michigan's jobless rate remained below the February 1983 level of 8.9 percent with 387,000 unemployed.



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